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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [RS](#)  
SUBJECT: PROBLEMS FOR TOLERANCE SUPPORT FOUNDATION IN  
NIZHNIY NOVGOROD

Classified By: Political M/C Alice G. Wells. Reason: 1.4 (d).

#### Summary

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¶1. (C) On March 20, law enforcement officials in Nizhniy Novgorod raided the offices of the Fund in Support of Tolerance (FST), the successor organization to the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) and confiscated the organization's computers. At the same time, in what appeared a well-organized operation, the homes of more than 30 staff members were searched and personal computers and cell phones confiscated. FST leaders see the raids as part of a pressure campaign, linked to their plans to publish a report on human right abuses in Chechnya, which alleges that Russian forces committed war crimes and calls for accountability under international law. They also suggested that the raids may have been part of a broader nationwide campaign against the banned National Bolshevik party, since many of the staff are associated with that organization as well (septel). Our contacts told us that the Fund in Support of Tolerance will continue operating temporarily out of individuals' apartments until the report is completed. We will continue to raise our concerns with GOR officials over the treatment of the RCFS and its FST successor. End summary.

#### The Raids

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¶2. (C) On March 20, law enforcement authorities in Nizhniy Novgorod searched the offices of the Fund in Support of Tolerance (FST), a human rights group established by the leadership of the former Russian-Chechen Friendship Society, Oksana Chelysheva and Stanislav Dmitrievskiy. Dmitrievskiy described the raids as well organized and, as he has long maintained, directed from Moscow. Press reports indicated that militia showed up at the homes of 20 staff members of the FST in Nizhniy Novgorod and 10 other staff in Arzamas at the same time -- 7:00 am. Militia confiscated all computers and cell phones of those searched. Dmitrievskiy maintained that such a major undertaking was beyond the abilities of the local law enforcement agencies and required organization and support from Moscow.

¶3. (C) Chelysheva and Dmitrievskiy posited two explanations for the search: First, the FST plans to complete a major report on human rights abuses in Chechnya in the next two months. Second, both noted that most staff at the FST were also members of Other Russia and closely associated with the National Bolshevik party, which is the target of a nationwide pressure campaign.

#### FST Continues to Operate

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15. (C) In the three days since the raid, Dmitrievskiy told us that he had set up facilities in various apartments throughout Nizhniy Novgorod for staff to complete the report on Chechnya. He noted that the militia did not raid his home as it would have caused too great a scandal. He said he was too visible of an individual and his name appearing in the press reports would have received wide coverage. As a result, he felt the FST staff could continue to work on the report until completion.

16. (C) Dmitrievskiy told us that the authorities had not been able to use the 2006 NGO law to put pressure on his new NGO, the Fund in Support of Tolerance, because he had carefully and thoughtfully worked out the legal intricacies of the law. After the Russian-Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS) was liquidated in Russia, he re-established it in Helsinki. He then set up the FST as a separate, Russian NGO in Nizhniy Novgorod. The Helsinki-based RCFS receives international grants and then, through cooperative agreement with the FST, transfers the work and money to Dmitrievskiy in Nizhniy Novgorod. He said that the Ministry of Justice had recently audited the FST and found no problems with the arrangement.

#### Forthcoming Human Rights Report on Chechnya

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17. (C) Dmitrievskiy told us that the FST had put aside its public political activity to focus on producing a report of human rights abuses during the Chechen campaigns. The report could be completed in two months if, as Dmitrievskiy noted, the organization is left to do its work. The report will compile statistics from numerous sources including Memorial, Human Rights Watch and FST's own monitoring of the conflict. He said it would include information on tens of thousands of incidents and cover almost 900 pages. Because of FST's

previous police raids, he told us that they had routinely saved copies of their work off-site thus saving about 98 percent of what they had produced up to March 20. He expects the full report to be published simultaneously in both English and Russia.

18. (C) In an advance copy of the report's introduction, provided to Embassy by Chelysheva, the FST alleges that the Chechen conflicts of 1994-96 and 1999-2007 are analogous in scale and tragic effect as those that took place in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, with up to a hundred thousand victims, most of whom were civilians. The report claims to have evidence to accuse Russian forces of war crimes and "crimes against humanity" -- arguing that the perpetrators should be criminally liable under international law.

#### Comment

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19. (C) There is little doubt that the FST continues to be a target of politicized legal pressure, but it is difficult to determine the full story of what's going on in Nizhniy Novgorod, whose local government has a well-deserved reputation for heavy-handedness. Our primary source of information is the leadership of the FST itself, who may or may not have an understanding of government motivations. For a Kremlin beset by paranoia about Western "interference" in Russia affairs under the "guise" of humanitarian interests, allegations of war crimes that could put Russian officials under the scrutiny of international bodies are unwelcome and could have led to a decision to again disrupt the work of the FST. The authorities' tactics appear to follow a pattern of periodic harassment, which can be traced back to the government's pique at Dmitrievskiy's involvement in the "Dissenters' March" last April. Whatever the motivations, given Dmitrievskiy's and Chelysheva's determination to continue with their work, we can expect further harassment in the coming months and potentially an escalation of administrative pressure against the FST leadership. We frequently have raised the treatment of the RCFS with GOR officials and the Ombudsman's Office, and will do the same

for the FST.  
BURNS